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# U.S. Aides Said to Doubt Some Walker Statements

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 24 — The Government wants to postpone the sentencing of John A. Walker Jr. because prosecutors need more time to determine if he is telling the complete truth about his Soviet espionage operation, according to law-enforcement officials and other sources.

A Reagan Administration official knowledgeable about the case said some of Mr. Walker's statements to prosecutors had been difficult or impossible to verify. "Certain stories are in question," the official said.

Mr. Walker's chief defense lawyer acknowledged that because of the complexity of the case, prosecutors would have difficulty corroborating some accounts provided by Mr. Walker in extensive interviews.

## Walker Pressed on Other Spies

But the lawyer, Fred Warren Bennett, said he doubted that the plea bargain would fall through and credited the Government with dealing honestly with Mr. Walker.

Mr. Walker, a retired Navy warrant officer, and his son, Michael, a Navy seaman, were to be sentenced Thursday. But last week Federal prosecutors in Baltimore, where the case has been prosecuted, asked a judge to postpone the sentencing at least a month.

A source close to the case said the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department were still pressing Mr. Walker to disclose whether others not charged were involved in the spy ring. Officials have said that Mr. Walker's espionage operation gave the Soviet Union valuable Navy communications secrets before he was arrested in May 1985.

In what is widely described as one of the most serious spy cases in the nation's history, John and Michael Walker pleaded guilty to espionage last year in exchange for an agreement that could limit their prison terms.

It was unclear how John Walker would benefit by lying about the espionage operation. His plea bargain is dependent on his truthfulness in interviews with prosecutors.

In an interview Mr. Walker's lawyer, Mr. Bennett, declined to say whether



Associated Press

John A. Walker Jr.

prosecutors had recently questioned his client's truthfulness. "I'm not going to discuss whether they feel he has been 100 percent accurate in every respect," the lawyer said.

But Mr. Bennett said there was "nothing at this point" to indicate that "the Government is taking any action to claim a breach of the agreement."

Another source close to the case said, however, that a "possible glitch" had developed that could cause the Government to rethink its agreement. This source would not be specific.

Robert N. McDonald, an assistant United States attorney overseeing the case, would say little about the prosecution's request for a delay but noted that officials wanted additional time to talk with John Walker.

Under the plea agreement, John and Michael Walker agreed to provide prosecutors with a full account of their espionage activities. A major violation of the agreement would permit prosecutors to place the Walkers on trial.

## Sentences for 2 Walkers

The plea agreement called for Mr. Walker to be sentenced to life in prison; Michael Walker would face a 25-year term. Both could be freed on parole years earlier; defense lawyers said the plea bargain could hasten parole.

Two other Navy veterans — John Walker's brother, Arthur, and a close friend, Jerry A. Whitworth — were tried and convicted on espionage charges in the case. Mr. Whitworth, a former Navy communications specialist, is awaiting sentencing.

Lawyers for John and Michael Walker said they were optimistic that the Government would go forward with the plea bargain.

Mr. Bennett, John Walker's lawyer, said prosecutors sought the delay primarily because it would have been impossible to complete the interviews with his client before Thursday. Mr. Walker, he noted, had spent much of the summer in California, where he testified at Mr. Whitworth's trial.

## Spying Goes Back Many Years

Mr. Bennett said the Government "can't put the final touches on everything between now and next Thursday and run down and check out every piece of information" being provided by Mr. Walker.

The lawyer said it was not surprising that prosecutors would have trouble confirming some of Mr. Walker's statements about an espionage operation that dates back many years. "You're talking about them trying to corroborate or disprove something that occurred as early as 1968," Mr. Bennett said.

He said he doubted whether law-enforcement officials would ever be completely satisfied with Mr. Walker's statements about the size of the spy ring. Prosecutors, Mr. Bennett noted, have long been interested in the identity of someone given the code name A in Mr. Walker's papers.

Before Mr. Walker's guilty plea, Government officials said they had been unable to identify A and could not determine if A was a fifth member of the spy ring. Other members of the spy ring had also been given code names.

Mr. Bennett would not comment on what John Walker had told prosecutors about others who might have participated in the espionage operation.

Charles Bernstein, Michael Walker's lawyer, said his client had cooperated fully with prosecutors. "I don't think there are going to be any problems for Michael," Mr. Bernstein said. He declined to comment on John Walker's case.